Master

FEATURES

Fuenf Finger sind keine Faust (Five Fingers do not Make a Fist) by Klaus Rainer Roehl. Cologne, 1974. Review and excerpts.

Roehl's memoirs are summarized and excerpted primarily to provide background information on the evolution of urban terrorism in West Germany and its international ramifications. There is evidence that Germany's Baader-Meinhof gang, like the New Left movement which spawned it, received much of its "inspiration" from other parts of the world, especially the Near East. Roehl cites, for example, Baader-Meinhof's connection with El Fatah.

The nebulous but recurring connection between Soviet bloc countries and Western terrorists warrants publicizing and commentary. The covert funding role played by East Europe on behalf of Roehl's radical magazine is, as noted in an earlier "Features", particularly exploitable. A more direct connection is suggested in East Germany's willingness -- under certain conditions -- to harbor the terrorist Meinhof after she had become a fugitive.

Finally, Roehl's condemnation of violence as a political weapon may be useful for replay. His former identity as illegal Communist and New Left radical adds weight to his present stand against terrorism.

REVIEW

"Fuenf Finger Sind Keine Faust" (Five Fingers do not Make a Fist) is the political diary of Klaus Rainer Roehl, one time member of West Germany's illegal Communist Party, editor of the radic-lib magazine, "Konkret," and husband of terrorist Ulrike Meinhof. An active participant in leftist political and social movements of the past three decades, he documents the evolution of the New Left and international terrorism plus the occasional interference of the Soviet bloc in West German affairs. His version of history is filtered through personal experiences -- often illuminating but more often distorting. His memoirs do not apologize for past activities or renounce past allegiances, nor do they explain satisfactorily his recent conversion to Social Democracy.

Roehl provides few details about his association with the Communist Party from the late fifties until 1964. As the editor of a liberal/left student newspaper, he was acquainted with a number of students who were party members. His conversion to Communism was a gradual process resulting from his revulsion over the Nazi experience. His fledgling magazine was heavily financed by covert funds obtained in East Berlin and filtered through Czechoslovakia. "Konkret" accepted some editorial direction as well as money from the East. In 1964, however, after Roehl bit the hand that fed him by publishing an unflattering article on life in East Germany, the party demanded his expulsion, and the money stopped. So did "Konkret." The magazine, firmly established and brilliantly edited, soon attracted sufficient legitimate funds to resume operations. Although his formal working relationship with the Communist Party and East Germany did not resume, Roehl maintained cordial relations with contacts in the East.

Extensive detail is provided on the role "Konkret" played in directing the activities of the New Left (during and after the covert funding). Beginning in the 1950's as the organizer of students protesting atomic arms, "Konkret" remained a leading force in all subsequent student movements: peace and anti-Vietnam demonstrations, the sexual revolution, the drug counter-culture. By the late 1960's, Roehl took "Berlin radicals" into his staff; the magazine began preaching the politics of violence. For Ulrike Meinhof, columnist and sometimes editor of "Konkret" and Roehl's wife until 1968, the transformation from political activist to terrorist was inevitable. The radicalizing process was completed in 1970 when she "liberated" terrorist Andreas Baader from prison and joined his gang in flight and further acts of terror.

Roehl, however, did not make the transformation to terrorist. He found himself the target of extremists. To the radicals on his staff he symbolized the establishment. They attacked his authority, his magazine, and ultimately his home. Only after experiencing violence first hand did Roehl become disenchanted with the politics of violence. Only after his own daughter was found taking drugs, did he become disenchanted with the drug counter-culture. In the early 1970's "Konkret" took a stand against terrorism and drug-abuse. At the same time, Roehl announced his entrance into the Social Democratic Party.

If Roehl's transformation seems inconsistent with his past, he is unaware of the inconsistency. His explanation is disillusionment. He is still disillusioned with western authorities. He is newly disillusioned with the East Germany he discovered in the 1970's, with his wife's terrorist friends, and with a younger generation ignorant of past leftist accomplishments. He sees social democracy as the only alternative left to him.

EXCERPTS

In the middle of the 1950's Roehl meets members of the illegal Communist Party -- among them "Comrade B." (p.88):

"He avoided phrases about...rapprochement and understanding...He said, in essence, ... 'We want power. We, the Communists.' ... He said, 'Of course we are for democracy, as long as we're in the minority. When we have the majority, we are for dictatorship. Anything else is stuff and nonsense."

Speaking of the early days of SDS and the New Left (p. 151):

"Everyone was naive at that time, everyone of the Left. The great awareness, but also a great coldness, came later."

(p. 251) "For half a year (in 1966) people have fun with the institutions, which are surprised and helpless. They are armed only with spray paint, alarm whistles, and raw eggs -- keeping cleaning firms busy but not hospitals or funeral homes. Then German authority strikes ... A police sentry shoots an unarmed student, who demonstrated against the Shah (of Iran)."

(p. 259) "New, entirely new forms of political resistance are evolving. A transfusion is necessary for the Left ... whether it was enlightenment over the Vietnam war or enlightenment over the pill ..., the common word was 'enlightenment'."

Roehl's first meeting (in 1967) with left-radical leader, Rudi Dutschke:

(p. 275) "He was -- yes, how was he? Overpowering? Fascinating? The first impression cannot be described in one word ... It is known that Dutschke had an aura to which normally skeptical intellectuals all too gladly submitted. From this first moment on, I decided to throw all my capabilities as a publicist and my magazine in with this man and his cause."

(p. 278) "From early summer 1967 on, I was Dutschke's fellow traveller and placed the magazine totally at his disposal. If he demanded two thousand Marks, I handed it over, firmly convinced that the money would be well used. If he started a campaign like ... 'Out of NATO' ... I followed him gladly."

(p. 283) "The Long March through (society's) institutions only began when the rest of the beaten anti-authority movement had scattered like a diaspora over the entire Federal Republic and its political institutions ... We realized quite early that an important task and opportunity fell to "Konkret" -- to organize and coordinate all of the scattered individuals and persons."

Speaking of his first association in 1968 with the "Berlin radicals":

(p. 329) "I published those first open discussions about violence. I did not take them seriously enough. I did not know that words could change directly into 9mm bullets ... I published everything for one whole year. I regarded everything as literature, theory, until my own windows were broken in, my telephone line cut, my house stormed, my children abducted ... We were unsuspecting."

In May 1969 after several confrontations with the radicals on his magazine staff, Roehl emerges victorious. He documents their response:

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(p. 372) "Ulrike Meinhof appears (in Hamburg)... Her comrades ... are provoked. They ask what should happen now. Suddenly the order comes: On to Blankenese (site of Roehl's home"... Bernhard Vesper's gray Volvo stops in front of Roehl's home ... Walls and doors are smeared with paint ... the house is stormed and ... laid waste ... The telephone is ripped out, windows and doors are broken in, chests and tables are overturned, beds are urinated on ... Then before the neighbors can fetch the police, the thirty-odd commandoes disappear."

(p. 380) "The prophets of violence ... no longer have space in "Konkret." After the (recent) experiences we take a clear stand against force and terror."

Remembering 1970 when Ulrike freed Baader and kidnapped her and Roehl's children:

(p. 391) "The Baader liberation, the abduction of my children, and the shooting of human beings changed my attitude. The fun was over. The revolution which was supposed to be fun. The fun from building socialism ... Cheer and light-heartedness and friendliness left me ... Even in the war I did not learn the hardness and insensitivity which now and in years to come would become necessary. But this was war and I was -- and remain still -- in the middle of it."

(p.395) Several days after freeing Baader, Ulrike sought asylum in East Berlin. She contacted party member Manfred Kapluck who informed her that East Berlin "would be inclined to take her, but her alone. She could perhaps be made into a kind of Angela Davis. She had a ... past which could be touched up to appear 'consistently progressive.' But Ulrike had to part from the anarchists who had come with her to East Berlin. She didn't want to. She was sent away to the Near East. NB: they did not travel without the knowledge of East Germany ...."

(p. 401) The Baader group insists that Ulrike part from her children, a hindrance and relic of bourgeois relationships. Group members travel to the Near East to arrange for the children to be placed in a Palestinian orphanage. "Here is where the death-commandoes allegedly recruit their kamikaze fighters, who are prepared to blow themselves up with an entire school class. What is cheap in Palestine ... seemed monstrous for German children in the opinion of the El Fatah representative: 'Would you like to make little monsters of them?' he asked members of the Baader group."

Explaining Baader's "Propaganda of Action":

(p.419) "After long preparation which served only to finance the 'infrastructure' (weapons, reinforcements, hiding places, transportation), he planned several "spectacular' actions: individual terror ... The group had to 'do' something ... set an example, or the whole period of preparation was purely self-serving and they were mere bank robbers without serious political motivation."

In May 1972 the Baader group was responsible for six bombings in six major German cities. Roehl describes this as (p. 433) "A new ... escalation of political insanity. This was no longer a case of aimed shots. No 'We shoot only when shot at to avoid arrest.' This was random murder: a bomb -- whether it falls from above or is set off from below -- explodes without regard for the civilian population ... Here it doesn't help to say, 'Comrades, we have made a mistake.' Those (terrorists) were not our comrades. They were nobody's comrades."